ADVENTURES AND DEATH OF A JOURNALIST

To fully appreciate this story, it must be understood that Bob Edwards liked a drink as well or better than the average man. In fact, when the urge came upon him, Bob was apt to forget friend, foe and The Eye Opener, whose more or less irregular appearance punctuated Bob's lapses.

It must also be understood that Bob Edwards was the great champion of the underdog, the little man; a fact which certain down-trodden individuals and knights battling in lost causes had good reason to remember. When, for instance, Bob went one morning into a Calgary Cafe to have breakfast, he noticed that one of the waitresses had been weeping.

"What's the matter, Rosie?" asked Edwards. "Who stole your scone?"

The waitress told him she had bought two worthless lots from a Calgary Real Estate man, investing all her savings.

"It's all right, Rosie," Bob said, "you leave everything to me."

Bob went to the Real Estate man and told him to refund the girl's money.

"Who the devil do you think you are?"

"I'm the Eye Opener man."

"I don't care if you're the devil himself. Get out of my office!"

Edwards went. But the next day the Eye Opener told the whole tale, and in a little paragraph at the end, Bob wrote that in the next issue he would reveal the Real Estate dealer's name.

A day or so later, Bob went again to the same cafe. The girl was happily smiling. Bob knew that everything was all right.

It was 1915. Calgary had weathered the land boom and the oil boom and now had decided to settle the liquor question. For a long while there had been a growing sentiment in Calgary for some restriction of the liquor traffic. The hotel-men, who ran all the bars, were getting nervous for at last a vote on the prohibition question was coming up.

They had good reason to be nervous. A group of smart young men had taken up the cause of prohibition, and had conducted their campaign so successfully that they needed only one good stout blow to turn the tide.

The Calgary hotel-men were even more frightened when news reached them one day that Bob Edwards might turn against them.

This news was unbelievable and cataclysmic. For years Bob had been one of the steadiest customers at the Calgary bars. Many of his closest friends were bar-tenders. None of the hotel-men had noticed a coolness on Bob's part toward his friends of the beer-taps and whiskey bottles, and they simply couldn't understand

the rumor. They picked a delegation and sent them to find out the truth.

"Yes," said Bob, when the delegates had gathered in his office, "I don't like what you fellows have been doing. You call yourselves hotel-men, when most of you have no room a dog would sleep in. I don't like it. The hotel business is suffering, and so is the liquor business. It's getting so that when you go in for a drink, you're not sure whether it's genuine red-eye or snake poison."

"But, Bob," protested one of the delegates, "We all know you and . . . "

"Sure," said Edwards, "I've been a good customer, but I've always paid for my fun. I don't owe you a thing, and I think a change is called for."

"Look, Bob," said another delegate, "if the Prohibitionists win out, it'll be horrible. You won't be able to get a drink anywhere then. You'll be . . ."

"I know that," replied Bob, "but it's all right. Maybe it'd be good for me to go on the wagon. Anyway, I'm tired of the bad stuff you've been putting out."

Then one of the craftier delegates spoke up. "Bob, you could use some money, couldn't you?"

"Certainly."

"Maybe you could use a lot of money?"

"I certainly could."

"All right. We'll give you fifteen-thousand dollars if you'll support the hotel-men in this vote. That'd keep you going for some time."

Bob thought a moment, then he stood up.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you can leave my office. I've never sold the old rag yet, and I never will." He help open the door.

"All right, Bob," said one of the delegates, "it's your choice. I only hope you won't be sorry."

"I won't be," Bob replied.

That same day Bob entertained a delegation from the Prohibition interests.

"We need you, Bob," said one of the delegates. "If you turned against the liquor interests, it would swing the vote. How about it?"

"Well, gentlemen," Bob replied, "I don't know. A lot of those fellows are my friends." He thought for a moment. "They offered me fifteen-thousand dollars. That's enough to get back at one grab, most of the money I've spent with them. How much will you fellows offer?"

"We haven't got a dollar, Bob."

"It's a good thing. I won't be bought or sold. Friends or no friends. I'll tell you what I'll do. I've told those fellows

how I feel, and I'll back my play. This is Monday. The Eye Opener comes out on Saturday. I'll write an article in support of Prohibition for the Saturday paper."

"Thanks, Bob," said the delegates.

"Don't thank me. This is a matter of principle. If the bar-keepers had shot square with the public and with me, I'd have stuck by 'em. Let's see what you can do!"

So Bob Edwards wrote in a new role -- the champion of Prohibition. The article he penned that Monday night was strong stuff. He drew the readers attention to the fact that if they voted for Prohibition, it would injure the hotel-keepers. H e asked that they pause and think about that, but he also asked that they consider the drunkards who squandered their money on bad whiskey; the hardships of drink on women and children; and ended up by saying: "Now, gentle reader, if your vote on Monday will help dash the glass from a drunkard's lips, support the bill!"

And having written this epistle, Bob Edwards went to bed sober.

The Calgary daily newspaper, The Albertan, was at that time printing the Eye Opener. The Albertan was edited by one of Western Canada's really great newspaper men, Davidson. Mr. Davidson, out of courage and friendship for Bob, had taken on the job of getting out the Eye Opener.

On Tuesday, Bob sent the article over to The Albertan to be set, and had no reason to think about it again until Thursday. On Thursday a couple of the bar-boys went around to see Bob and

took him a few bottles of first class, grade A, bottled-in-bond. Bob was never one to refuse a drink, and this polite gesture was one he could deeply appreciate. The first drink led to a second, and so on until Bob was left sitting at his desk in no fit condition to battle anybody's cause. Anyone knowing Bob would have realized that this was the start of a "bat", for which he was famous; and which might last from two, three days, to a week. The hotel-men simply stood by, and waited.

That afternoon, Charly Taylor brought from The Albertan, the proof of the Eye Opener's front page for Bob to proof-read. Bob was still sitting at his desk, quite drunk, unable to focus his eyes, and not caring anyway. He took one bleary look at the copy, grabbed a pencil and marked a big X right across the whole front page. Thereafter, he said and did nothing more. A couple of his friends came and bore him sorrowfully to the hospital, where Bob kept a room for just such occasions as this, while Charly Taylor trudged back to The Albertan with a canceled front page and a heart full of grief.

The Prohibition people had heard, by this time, what was going on, and had rushed to salvage as much of the wreckage as they could. They sought the advice of Mr. Davidson who said:

"Well, boys, Bob told me to print five-thousand copies of the Eye Opener. So far I haven't seen or heard an order contermanding that."

"But Bob canceled the front page! It hasn't even been proof-read!"

"That's all right," said Mr. Davidson, "I'll proof-read it, and we'll get the paper out just the same!"

The Prohibition people went away feeling fine. Possibly they wouldn't have felt so fine had they known what was going on in the Edwards' office.

Bob had a girl working for him, and her job was to count the papers, check them out to the newsboys, and keep a general eye on things. When Bob was carried out, she was left to hold the fort.

On Friday morning, she was visited by two of the hotel-men.

"We want to buy five-thousand copies of the Eye Opener."

"The papers haven't come up yet," said the girl. "And anyway, you couldn't buy them all like that. Mr. Edwards wouldn't like it."

"We want five-thousand copies," the man said, "and don't argue abo t it. We'll pay the full retail price."

"I don't know," said the girl. "If you come back . . ."

"When will those papers be here?"

"They usually come up late Friday evening."

"We'll be here," said the man. "Five thousand. Don't forget."

Naturally the prohibition boys heard the news of this new threat. Once again they sought Mr. Davidson's advice.

"Well," said Davidson, "We'll break up that scheme, all right. The paper's ready now. We'll mail all the out of town Eye Openers, then we'll lock up the rest of the issues right here in the valut."

So the Eye Opener containing Bob's attack on the liquor interests never reached Bob's office. But Bob's prohibition friends, fearing an attack by the Hotel-men on Bob's premises, crouched in the Eye Opener office that Friday night, fully expecting that some time before morning they would be engaged in actual war. However, the hotel-men, probably learning of the where-abouts of the papers, never showed up.

Bob Edwards meanwhile slept peacefully at the hospital.

On Saturday morning, the Eye Opener was on the Calgary streets.

When the vote on Prohibition was counted, the Prohibitionists had won by sixty-thousand to forty-thousand. One of Bob's friends went to the hospital to tell him the news. Bob was still wobbly, but got up, dressed and went down to his office. The Prohibitionists were having a big parade, and when it passed Bob's office, the whole parade stopped. People cheered and cheered. Bob smiled, a bit puzzled by the whole affair, but glad to see the people happy.

The hotel-men had bought nearly a whole page of the Eye Opener for an ad, and for this space they never paid a cent.

Bob always felt bad about that.